

Donnelly's Revue

With Some Help From Friends

By Tom Donnelly

In her chapter on "The Well-Appointed House," Emily Post explains what sort of furniture belongs in which kind of setting, how many servants a sizable establishment requires, how guests should be announced, and answers such questions as "Are maids allowed to receive men friends?" In another section she discusses protocol in Washington in helpful detail. ("Unlimited card-leaving is no longer a requirement.") But nowhere, at least not in my 1955 edition, does Mrs. Post go into the problems of etiquette that arise when houses are given, loaned, or otherwise made available to Presidents and other politicians by rich millionaires.

Take those revelations about how Robert Abplanalp, the spray valve tycoon, put up \$625,000 (or was it \$1.2 million?) so Mr. Nixon could have a *pied-a-terre* in San Clemente, along with his places in Washington and Key Biscayne. Now, I can see how a wealthy friend might lend one his shooting box in Scotland or his hacienda in Madrid, or his hideaway in Palm Springs for a few days or a week or a month. I can even imagine that the eager guest might nudge the host a bit: "By the way, old chap, I'm going to be in Scotland next month on business. Don't you have a little lean-to of some sort there?"

But I have the most enormous difficulty trying to conjure up the conversation that led to the establishment of the Western White House.

Something like this?

"Frankly, Bob, it's getting so I hardly ever have a good

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night's rest. Worrying about National Security, you know."

"That bad, eh, Dick?"

"Worse. I wonder if a change of scene might help? After all, you can't look at the Redskins all the time. They don't *play* all the time. But how about that Billy Kilmer, eh, Bob?"

"Only the greatest."

(Fifteen minutes are spent on Billy Kilmer).

"Sometimes I wish I were a Redskin myself, Bob. They're going to California for a game, you know. Did I tell you I saw a place out there for \$625,000?"

"Let me get it for you, Dick"

"Bob, let me make one thing perfectly clear. I'd be delighted."

But no, it *couldn't* have been like that. Maybe:

"Dick, you're looking peaked. Let me help put the roses back in your cheeks. I've got several hundreds of thousands lying around and I don't know anybody I'd rather get a huge California estate for . . ."

But, no. It was probably something very simple. "Bob, how about lending me \$625,000? Pay you back Tuesday." "Sure, Dick." "And let's not put our deal on the front page of the real estate section." "Right, Dick. Make 'em dig for it." "That's not too funny, Bob." "Sorry, Mr. President."

It's all very strange, when you consider that the Nixon administration has been so high on the Protestant work ethic, and so mean about economic opportunities for the underprivileged. Having a multi-millionaire friend finance your occupancy of an estate that's beyond your means is definitely not the kind of thing they advocate in the best Sunday schools. That's what's known in my set as pulling yourself up by somebody else's boot straps.

In the chapter on weddings in her "Etiquette," Emily Post says, "Nearest relatives may properly give their gifts in the form of money. Ordinarily it would be in very bad taste to display such gifts, but because it would not be fair to a generous check-giving relative or very intimate friend of the family to have it supposed that he or she sent no gift at all, it is quite proper to display checks with amounts concealed."

Presumably Emily would frown on the old political custom of boasting about the amounts and concealing the names. Emily does not consider this question: "Is it proper for a friend of the family to buy a \$125,000 house for the use of a friend's daughter and her bridegroom?" Which is what they say Bebe Rebozo did for Julie and David Eisenhower.

This seems to me to be another social baffler. I've known plenty of parents who have helped the kids with the rent, even helped them with down payments

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on a house. But to have one of Papa's cronies buy a house for the kids to play in; well, it just isn't done. Except, apparently, in the Burning Tree Country Club area.

Mind you, I don't exactly move in moneyed circles but I do have a few rich acquaintances, as I'm sure most of us have.

I asked these rich ones if they go around buying real estate for their more impecunious friends. Their reactions to such a possibility ranged from shock to disgust. One snobbish old party said, "I suppose it's the sort of thing someone with new money might do. Especially if the person on the receiving end was a celebrity or a politician or someone of that sort."

Considering the magnitude of the Watergate mess, the Nixonian real-estate dealings may be a penny ante mystery. But you remember when Sherman Adams got in trouble because Bernard Goldfine paid his hotel bills? I was one of the very few who wondered why on earth Great Friend Adams wasn't put up at the Goldfine mansion, instead of at a hotel. If one has a mansion, one puts one's guests in the guest room, not in the neighborhood Hilton. Just ask Emily. To do otherwise is weird, and typical of the relations of politicians and tycoons.

By the way, the chapter in "Etiquette" on "The Well-Appointed House" begins like this:

"Every house has an outward appearance to be made as presentable as possible, and an interior to be set in order and cleaned."

Oh, Emily, ain't that the truth!